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Reprint of GSU 20th Anniversary Press Release

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Celebrating 20 Years – 14 Years Ago

July 17, 1989, Governors State University marked its 20th anniversary and waxed nostalgic. We share the following archived press release – provided courtesy of Professor Mel Muchnik – from June of 1989:

Date: 21 June 1989

For release: IMMEDIATE

UNIVERSITY PARK – On July 17, 1969, mankind was holding its collective breath anxiously waiting for Neil Armstrong to land on the moon.

“Funny Girl” and “Midnight Cowboy” were box-office successes.

The newly elected Nixon Administration said it was deferring work on housing and urban problems until it ended the Vietnam War and inflation.

The 1969 Volkswagen Beetle was a beauty at \$1,799.

And Illinois Gov. Richard Ogilvie came to a party in the south suburbs to sign legislation that created Governors State University.

The new university was the outgrowth of long-range planning by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) which recognized a need for commuter campuses.

Once the IBHE had organized a statewide junior college system in 1964, it began work on organizing a university network that would allow students to complete their college degrees without having to go away to school.

These commuter campuses would be senior-level institutions offering junior and senior level classes for a bachelor's degree as well as master's degree curriculums.

By 1967 the Illinois Board of Higher Education's planning wheels for these universities were set in motion, and a group of south suburban citizens began their lobbying efforts to have a new university located in their area.

Organized as the South Cook-North Will Counties Committee on Higher Education, the citizens lobby used statistics and demographics to present its case for the site in Monee Township near Governors Highway at Stuenkel Road.

But the lobbying group was up against strong competition from other areas in Chicagoland who also wanted a university.

"We were among the people the experts said didn't have a chance of getting (the university) where it is," recalled James Patterson, one of the organizers of the South Cook-North Will Counties Committee. "We presented persuasive facts of the number of junior colleges around there.

"There was no college within many miles. The nearest four-year degree-granting institution was the University of Chicago," he said. "And we could say we had no opposition to a new university. Even the clergy from Tolentine (Catholic Center in Olympia Fields) were our supporters."

By 1968, the Illinois Legislature had selected the name of Governors State University, plans were underway for purchase of the land and feasibility studies for the university's development were under way.

The university officially came into being July 17, 1969, at a dinner the South Cook-North Will Counties Committee on Higher Education organized at Olympia Fields Country Club. Before more than 300 guests Gov. Richard Ogilvie signed the bill creating GSU into law.

Just how does one create a university? You take the best minds, you get excellent faculty with new ideas and you develop a curriculum that allows for experimentation, flexibility and innovation.

Governors State University responded to all those needs. Opening just two years after the legislation was signed, GSU offered its students the opportunity to develop their own curriculum, set their own goals and objectives, and work at the best of their abilities without meeting grade requirements.

While much has changed since then, the university still prides itself on its innovative ideas, excellent faculty and diverse student population. GSU's more than 14,000 alumni have worked to improve not only the south suburban area, but communities across the U.S. and the world.

Today GSU offers its more than 5,000 students courses for 23 bachelor's degrees and 22 master's degrees on its commuter campus in University Park, at its satellite office in Orland Park Place and at a host of sites throughout the Chicago metropolitan area.
